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ABSTRACT

Unless questions about student performance and student retention can be answered and unless educators are proactive in finding and publicizing such information, basic writing programs cannot determine if what they are doing is working. Hard data, especially from underrepresented groups, is needed to support these programs. At Arizona State University, for example, basic writing students take the "Stretch Program"--it essentially stretches English 101 over two semesters, giving the basic writing students more time. The "Stretch" students pass English 101 at a 6% higher rate than those who take "regular" English 101. Other basic writing programs are collecting and distributing these same kinds of hard data. For example, semester-to-semester retention is up 11% at Southern Illinois University (Carbondale), over 80% of their basic writing students pass the entire writing sequence at West Chester University. Placement data from Arizona State, detailed placement information from the last five fall semesters, detailed pass rate data, registration and pass rates, a graph of percentage of student population, pass rates for ENG 101-WAC 101 for the last five semesters, and pass rates for fall data are outlined, leading to several questions, especially about minority group students. (NKA)

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Hard Work and Hard Data: Getting Our Message Out

by Gregory R. Glau

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"Hard Work and Hard Data: Getting Our Message Out"

Gregory R. Glau, Arizona State University -- presented at CCCC, 1999

If you are like me, you see a lot of student papers where you give this advice: now that you've worked through this draft, you seem to have an idea of what you want to say . . . so why don't you use your last paragraph as the starting point for your next draft? That is, I'm suggesting that you start where you ended . . . Does that sound familiar?

Well, I want to start where I ended my presentation at last year's 4Cs, by pushing a little more at what kind of data about our basic writing programs we ought to look at--that is, how can we determine if what we're doing is working? Can we say that our writing programs produce better writers? Can we say that we help our students succeed in subsequent writing classes and/or in their other classes? At what rate do our students go on to the next class in our course sequence? And, if we think that we do have a successful program, how can we use that information to convince others, especially those who control our purse strings?

I'm convinced that unless we can answer such questions--questions about student performance, questions about student retention--and that unless we are proactive in finding and publicizing that information, that data, in the right form, that others will do it for us, which in effect often means they're doing it to us . . . and not always in the way that best represents the work that we do.

So, I want to talk a little about what I call "hard data"--facts and statistics, as opposed to, say, anecdotal evidence, and then I want to ask you to help me with some data that I've collected on students from under-represented groups--who make up a big

proportion of my own students--I'd like you to look through my information and perhaps give me some advice on whether

- It makes sense
- If we ought to distribute it
- And if so, in what "form" the data should be presented in

So, to get back to my beginning, here's how I ended last year:

. . . in addition to anecdotal evidence, I'm very pleased to note that many of us are coming up with hard data that support our basic writing programs.

In terms of retention, at Minnesota, for example, students who do NOT complete the BW sequence, or avoid it, or put it off, drop out at a higher rate than those who do complete the sequence. In terms of writing improvement, at Indiana University Southeast, Bill Sweigart reports that their two-course "developmental" sequence promotes real, measurable gains in student writing.

Last year I also noted that when Minnesota's basic writers take the next writing class (intermediate comp or an upper division writing class), they pass at the same rate as other, regular students. At South Carolina, students in the Writing Studio program pass ENG 101 at a better than 94 percent rate. At Arizona State University, our BW students take what we call the *Stretch Program*--it essentially "stretches" ENG 101 over two semesters, giving our BW students more time.

Our *Stretch Program* students pass ENG 101 at a 6 percent higher rate than those who take "regular" ENG 101. But more impressive is that our basic writing students also pass the next class in our sequence, the research-focused ENG 102 class, also at a 6

percent higher rate than other ENG 102 students. My key point, in a document that I sent around to everyone in upper administration who I could think of (and which elicited a hand-written note from Arizona State University's President, as well as notes from our Provost and the Dean of our college) is that we've taken students with the lowest test scores, twice as many who come from historically underrepresented groups, and made them the best ENG 102 students. Those are the kinds of messages we want to continue to send.

Here is how I represent pass rates on my web site:

Current pass rate information:

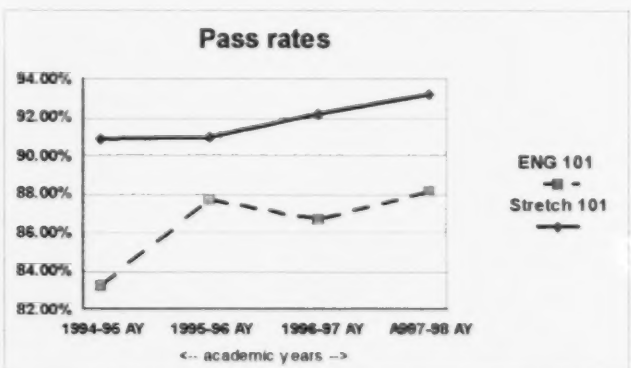
Average pass rate, all ENG 101 students, academic years 1994-95, 1995-96, 1996-97, 1997-98 (excludes summer sessions)..... **86.54 %**

Average pass rate, for ENG 101 *Stretch* students, academic years 1994-95, 1995-96, 1996-97, 1997-98 (excludes summer sessions)..... **91.90 %**

***Stretch* students pass ENG 101 at a five percent better rate than do "regular" ENG 101 students.**

Here is the ENG 101 information in "picture" form:

This graph shows the pass rate for the last four academic years and compares "regular" ENG 101 students to *Stretch* ENG 101 students:



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The data (top line--solid) for *Stretch* ENG 101 students shows the percentage of students who took and passed WAC 101 in the fall semester and then continued on into ENG 101 Stretch in the following spring semester, and who then passed ENG 101 with a grade of A, B, or C. Here, for instance, about 93% of our students passed *Stretch* ENG 101 in the 1997-98 academic year. The data (bottom line--dashed) for "regular" ENG 101 show the percentage of ENG 101 students who registered in fall or spring semesters and who received a grade of A,B, or C, out of the total # of students taking ENG 101.

I also have data about ENG 102 pass rates, presented in this format:

Here are the total numbers of students:

ENG 101, last four academic years:

total registered..... 13,107 total passed..... 11,343 average pass rate..... **86.54 %**

Stretch ENG 101, last four academic years:

total registered..... 2,038 total passed..... 1,873 average pass rate..... **91.90 %**

While we might expect (since they have the same teacher for two semesters) *Stretch* students to pass ENG 101 at a higher rate than "regular" ENG 101 students, they also pass ENG 102 at a higher rate:

Average pass rate, all ENG 102 students, academic years 1993-94, 1994-95, 1995-96, 1996-97, 1997-98..... **82.52 %**

Average pass rate, for ENG 102 *Stretch* students, academic years 1994-95, 1995-96, 1996-97,. 1997-98..... **85.93 %**

***Stretch* students pass ENG 102 at a higher rate than "regular" students do. That is, even when they're in "non-Stretch" classes, like ENG 102, *Stretch* students do better than "regular" ENG 101 students.**

In effect, this program helps those students seen as the most at-risk become the best achievers.

And I'm pleased to report that other BW Programs also are collecting and distributing these same kinds of hard data. For example, Dave Blakesley, who is the Director of Writing Studies at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, tells me that

since they've implemented their own version of *Stretch* (they place their students somewhat differently, though, through a "self-placement" procedure that I wish we could follow), their semester-to-semester retention is up 11 percent. Dave also tells me their Chancellor has been so pleased with the results that she is doing a write-up on the Writing Program, *Stretch*, and directed self-placement for her monthly newsletter.

Bill Lalicker at West Chester University tells me that over 80% of their BW students pass their entire writing sequence and that the six-year graduation and retention rates of students who began in ENG 020 are slightly higher than the University's average--actually, he's being modest, as they are about six percent higher than average.

All of this is good news, and that's where I want to start today's conversation--thinking about hard data. I want to especially ask for your help in terms of students from under-represented groups (if you'd like to know more about the data I have on our whole student population, it's on the web and that web address is on the handout I'll give you in a minute).

Anyway, rather than to "lecture" at you about the kind of hard data we ought to look for--which I think in effect would be preaching to the choir--what I want to do now is to work with some examples. I've listed (above) some data that I have on the web that--I think--presents information in what John Ramage calls "nuggets," small bits of the most important data, in capsule form. Now I want to move to several examples of information I've collected but which I have not yet distributed, because sometimes I'm not sure what it tells us, or perhaps some of it's good and some of it isn't so good . . . so

maybe you also can help me understand what it means and to help me decide whether or not I should even use some of it..

My hope here--in addition to asking for your help--is that perhaps through my examples you can see the kinds of information you might want to collect about your own students and their test scores and their pass rates and their retention rates--so again, rather than lecturing at you, I hope we can learn together a little bit about the use of hard data to best represent our BW programs.

Here are placement data:

Data from fall, 1997 (5,468 scores, but some students had both ACT and SAT scores)

	Average ACT	Median ACT	Average SAT verbal	Median SAT verbal
Placed into WAC 101	**15.91**	**16**	**431**	**440**
ENG 101	**22.57**	**23**	**547**	**550**
ENG 105 (honors)	**28.83**	**29**	**672**	**680**

Questions I have:

- Does the ACT/SAT data for students from under-represented groups show the same ranges between class placement?
- Does the data from other semesters show the same things?
- Does information like this mean that our placement process isn't as bad as it might be?

More detailed placement information, last five FALL semesters:

ENG 101: 14,438 students
Of these, students from under-represented groups: 2,686
Percent: **18.60 %**

WAC 101: 3,228 students
(Remember that WAC 101 is the first half of our *Stretch Program* for basic writers)
Of these, students from under-represented groups: 1,149
Percent: **35.59 %**

Questions I have:

- What does this variation in placement rates say about standardized-test placement? Or does it tell us anything?

More detailed pass rate data:

ENG 101, FALL semester pass rates, last three years:

Students **not** from under-represented groups	90.85 %
Students from under-represented groups	88.40 %

- On average, students from under-represented groups pass ENG 101 at about a <u>two percent</u> lower rate; is this significant?

Note: these figures are somewhat higher than our yearly averages (which include spring semesters); FYI, the average pass rate for all ENG 101 students, the last four academic years (13,107 students registered and 11,343 passed) is **86.54 %.**

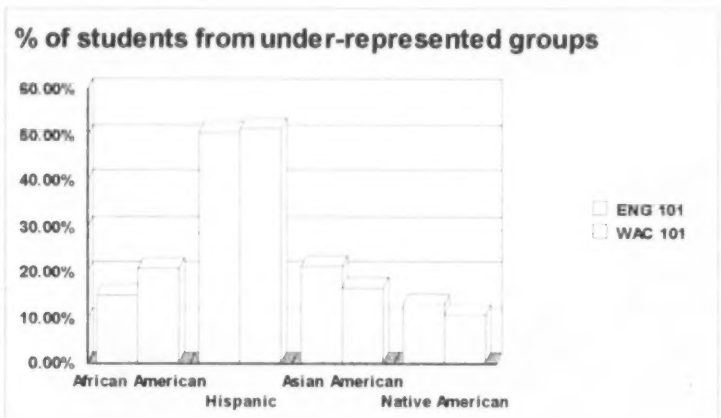
More detailed registration and pass rates, last five fall semesters:

(WAC 101 is the first class in our BW program)

Of the 1149 (from above), took **WAC 101**		percent of total	passed WAC 101	pass rate
African American	240	20.89%	213	88.75%
Hispanic	593	51.61%	525	88.53%
Asian American	190	16.54%	164	86.32%
Native American	126	10.97%	96	76.19%

Of the 2686 (from above), took **ENG 101**		percent of total	passed ENG 101	pass rate
African American	401	14.93%	341	85.04%
Hispanic	1360	50.63%	1178	86.62%
Asian American	572	21.30%	515	90.03%
Native American	351	13.07%	305	86.89%

Percentage of student population graph:



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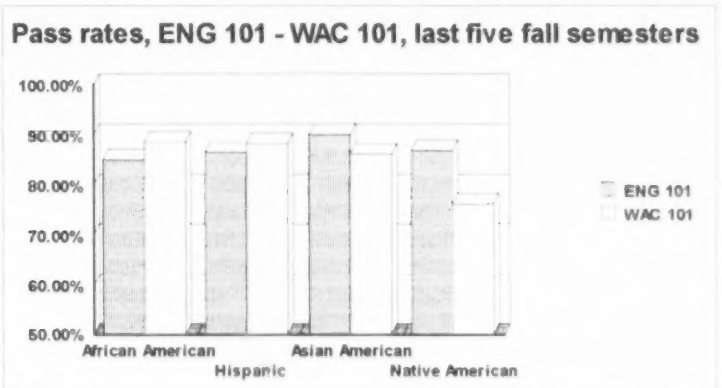
Questions I have:

- Does this picture help us understand the data better? In what way(s)?
- Could we display/explain the placement information more effectively?
- What does placement data like this tell us about our student population?

Detailed pass rate graph:

These data show the pass rates for (generally) first-semester students in their first university writing class (either ENG 101 or the first class in the *Stretch* sequence, WAC 101):



More information and a question:

- Why does *Stretch* do better with African-American and Hispanic students than it does with the other two groups?
- What can we do to improve our pass rates, especially for those we're not now helping as we might?
- At ASU, each fall we have several sections of ENG 101 just for Native American students, so perhaps WAC 101 looks weak here, at least partly because of those sections of ENG 101 . . . does this indicate that perhaps we need Native American sections of *Stretch*?

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Pass rates for just FALL data, for students (generally) taking their first university writing class:

Basic Writing students (who first take WAC 101--the first class in the *Stretch Program*--and then take a continuing ENG 101 class, usually with the same teacher and group of students)--**FALL semester** pass rates:

Students **not** from under-represented groups	88.25 %
Students from under-represented groups	83.29 %

- Students from under-represented groups pass WAC 101 at about a five percent lower rate; is this significant?

ASU's Basic Writing students:

	Students and under-represented groups	
	From	**Not from**
Pass WAC 101	83.29 %	88.25 %
Of those, register for ENG 101	88.91 %	89.07 %
Of those, who pass ENG 101	88.65 %	92.11 %

Students from under-represented groups

- pass WAC 101 at about a five percent lower rate
- register for ENG 101 at about the same rate
- pass ENG 101 at about a three percent lower rate

- Is any of this significant?